

The Latham Variations

Douglas Gordon

Freda (Latham Variations), 2017

Billiard table, Billiard balls

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery

For two or more players.

The aim of the game is to keep the spotted ball moving at all times by striking it with the white ball. Players take it in turn to achieve this but lose 'lives' if they fail, as described in The Rules. The winner is the last player still in the game.

1. An order of play is decided amongst the players prior to starting the game. This order must be adhered to. If a player loses 3 'lives' he/she must leave the game and the next player will restart proceedings in the same manner as at the beginning of the game and the ranks close up. The white ball with the black spot is placed in the centre of the table. The first player must propel the plain white ball from the opposite end of the table and is allowed 3 attempts to hit the spotted ball. If the player fails, he/she loses a 'life' and the next player in turn will start the game. Once the spotted ball has been struck by the white ball the game begins and it is then the turn of the next player.
2. Each player's turn follows in succession and starts from the moment the two balls come into contact at the end of the previous player's turn or if a rule is broken during that turn. His/her turn finishes if a rule is broken or when he/she has touched the white ball and that ball subsequently comes into contact with the red ball.
3. Successive players may handle the white ball, but only when it is their turn. If a player plays out of turn, he/she loses a life. The player whose turn it actually is restarts the game.
4. The white ball may be picked up at any time by the appropriate player (and as frequently as necessary) until it comes into contact with the spotted ball (at which time it becomes the turn of the next player). The player may only release (or deflect) the white ball when both his/her feet are placed on the ground behind either end of the table. A 'life' is lost if the white ball is not propelled from either end of the table. The next player in turn restarts the game.
5. The spotted ball can only be kept moving through contact with the white ball, which itself must be rolling freely (or stationary) at the time of contact. The player may not be in contact with the spotted ball in any way whilst it hits the white ball or will otherwise lose a life. The next player in turn restarts the game.
6. No player is allowed to touch the white ball directly. If this occurs that player will lose a 'life' and the player whose turn it is restarts the game.
7. The spotted ball must not stop. If this occurs the player whose turn it is will lose a 'life' and the next player in turn restarts the game.
8. Neither white nor the spotted balls may leave the table either via the pockets or over the edge. If this occurs the player who last caused the respective ball to keep moving loses a life and the next player in turn restarts the game.
9. No player may unreasonably obstruct the play of another. Unreasonable obstruction loses one 'life'. Appoint a sober umpire if absolutely necessary.